

CONFESSION

A

FUNDAMENTAL DOCTRINE

OF THE

GOSPEL ECONOMY.

—
BY WM. C. BUCK.
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“With the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”
Rom. 10: 10.

All agree that *faith* is an essential doctrine of the gospel; but few seem to regard *confession* as holding so prominent a position in the great economy of grace; at least it is not, ordinarily, so presented, either from the pulpit or the press. In this tenth chapter of Romans, however, the Apostle seems to present them as twin doctrines, of equal importance, and inseparable in the plan of salvation. The nature and importance of faith are so frequently discoursed upon by preachers and writers, as to obviate the necessity of any definition or explanation of it here. I propose, in this Tract, simply, to give a scriptural elucidation of the doctrine of *Confession*, to explain its nature and importance, as a principle in the economy of salvation. Before we proceed further, however, it may be necessary that we should give a brief attention to the lexicography of these two terms *profess* and *confess*, as English words; especially as our translators have rendered the Greek word *omologia* by these two words, indifferently, as though they were equivalents; and thus the English reader is

liable to be misled, as to the use of these terms in our English version. By reference to your Dictionaries, however, you will find that these two words are of very different import; thus, confession always refers to a rule or law supposed to be violated, and implies error or guilt on the part of the person confessing. We cannot *confess* to our virtues, merits or personal worth.—We confess our errors our sins. &c. On the other hand, we *profess* to be worthy, talented, virtuous, patriotic, &c., but we never profess to be lawless, worthless, guilty, &c. We may profess to be christians—disciples of Christ; but our professions may be illusive or untrue; but we confess our sins when convinced of them and are penitent for them.

The spirit and intention of the law of God, yea, of all law, requires a suitable confession on the part of all those who have infracted its precepts: honor, truth, justice, demand it. Not to confess our sins is a virtual impeachment of the law and government of God. To persist in the wrong against the right, is equivalent to charging the law of God with error, and the administrator of it with injustice; and who can conceive of a greater offence to the purity and honor of the Divine Majesty? When we confess our sins, and only when we do so, we vindicate the equity of the divine law, and justify the administration of it. Hence, the honor of God, of his law and government, all demand imperiously, that every transgression of the law shall be openly, fully and heartily confessed.

No where, in all the scriptures of truth, have we a single intimation that God ever forgave an unconfessed sin. When Achan was detected in his theft, though he knew that death was the penalty, still, when Joshua said to him: "My son, I pray thee, give glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto him;" he confessed all that he had done. See Josh. 7: 19, 20, 21. By this confession the law was vindicated, his

act condemned, the penalty justified, and God was glorified.

This principle of the law is set forth in all the sacrificial rites, both of the antediluvian and postdiluvian Patriarchs. We cannot dissociate the act of confession from a sacrifice offered in substitution of a sinner. In the Sinaitic law the doctrine is presented in bold relief. See Lev. 5: 5, 16, 21, and 26: 40; and elsewhere in the Mosaic code. No sacrifice was accepted, unless the party offering it had first confessed his sins over it, laying his hands upon the head of the victim. In the great national sacrifice the Priest laid his hands upon the head of the scape goat and confessed the sins of the people, as their representative; thus transferring, ceremonially, the sins of the people to the goat; and he being sent away by the hands of a proper person, bore away their sins into a land uninhabited. See Lev. 16: 8, 9, 10.

Now that God, as King in Israel, has fully vindicated this doctrine of the law in his dispensation of it, is clearly evinced in all his dealings toward that people. So Solomon understood the law. Hence, in his notable prayer dedicatory of the Temple, in no single instance has he asked forgiveness for unconfessed sins. See 1 Kings, chap 8. God promises to forgive the sins of Israel after they have confessed them, and only after they have confessed and forsaken them. See Lev. 16: 40 to 42. But so long as they remained obdurate and disregarding of his law, so long his rod was laid upon them. Daniel fully appreciated this doctrine of the law; so that, notwithstanding he had understood from books, that the time for the delivery of Israel from Babylon was near at hand, still he felt it to be necessary to humble himself, to fast and pray and to confess his sins and the sins of his nation before God, in order to secure the mercy promised. Read the ninth chapter of Daniel if you would have a sample of devout confes-

sion and earnest prayer to God, and a full vindication of the doctrine inculcated in this Tract. Nehemiah also recognized this principle of the law, as may be seen. Neh. 1: 4 to 11. So did all Israel. See Neh. chap. 9. These references to the old Testament scriptures may suffice to show that God, as King of Israel, so construed his own law; and so administered it.— Now let us see what the teachings of the New Testament are upon this important subject. John the Baptist is the first to announce the doctrine of repentance. But *confession* is the very core and pith of the doctrine of *repentance*. No one does, or can repent of an unconfessed sin. And so the people understood it; for when they believed John, they were “baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.” See Mat. 3. 6.— When our Lord sent out his Apostles, he charged them, saying, “As ye go preach, saying repent.” Now, as we have seen, repentance is impossible in the absence of confession. But our Lord has not left us to uncertainties upon this subject; for in this very commission to his Apostles he defines the import of repentance thus: “Whosoever, therefore, shall confess me before men, him will I confess, also, before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.” See Mat. 10: 32, 33. Conformably to this doctrine the Apostles and their associates taught and practiced. Hence, when the Gentiles at Ephesus heard the preaching of Paul and saw the miracles which he performed, “many that believed came and confessed, and shewed their deeds.” Acts 10: 18.— Paul says: “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shall believe in thine heart, that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.— For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” Rom. 10: 9, 10. Here confession and faith are pre-

sented to us as parallel and inseparable rudiments of the gospel, and of equal importance in the economy of salvation. John says: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John, 1: 9. He says also, "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him and he in God" 1 John, 4: 15. In the beginning of this same chapter he says, "Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God; and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God; and this is that spirit of anti-Christ whereof we have heard that it should come, and even now already is it in the world." John, in his gospel, speaks of certain rulers who believed in Christ, yet did not confess him, fearing that the Pharisees would expel them from the synagogue. If they believed in him, why did they not confess him? The inspired penman says: "For they loved the praises of men more than the praises of God." Surely Christ will deny all such false believers, in whatever age of the world they may have lived; for all such lovers of the praise of men virtually deny Christ before men. These passages will suffice, I trust, to show to my readers how this doctrine of the law was understood and enforced by our Lord and his Apostles. Let us now examine more particularly what the practice was pursuant to this doctrine.

Confessions are required to be made to offended or injured parties. If by transgressing the laws of the land, the rules of social society, or the fraternal relations of the church, we have injured or offended a man or a brother, our duty is to confess our faults to the party offended or injured; for only he or she can forgive the offence. See Jude 5: 16. Mat. 18: 21 and elsewhere. For all transgressions against the law of God, our confessions are due to God only; for he is the offended party, and he only can forgive transgressions

against his law. He has appointed no vicar or vicerent on earth to receive confessions due only to him ; nor has he empowered any conclave of ecclesiastics, priest or pope to grant pardons for sin. These only can issue from Messiah, " who is exalted a Prince and a Saviour to give repentance and remission of sins."—Confession of sins to God is the act of a penitent—it is " repentance towards God." It is the penitent sinner's confession to the holiness of the law and the justice of the sentence pronounced against him. See. Psa. 32 : 5. Rom. 7 : 12 to 14.

When a penitent had sincerely and prayerfully confessed his sins to God, privately, he was required, as an act vindicative of the law, to make a public confession also. Under the Mosaic dispensation, the delinquent came with his sacrifice, and in the presence and audience of the priest, as the appointed minister of God, laid his hands on the head of the victim and confessed his sins. The animal was then offered in sacrifice, and thus the delinquent publicly confessed unto God. See the passages already quoted from Leviticus ; also 2 Chro. 30 : 22.

Under the gospel dispensation, when the penitent has confessed and repented of his sins before God and obtained pardon, he is also required to make a public confession of his sins to God, before men ; and this he does in the act of baptism. John required of those who were admitted to his baptism, that they should bring forth fruits meet for repentance ; i. e., such evidences of the sincerity of their repentance as would satisfy him, as God's minister, that they were proper subjects of his baptism ; and when this was done, they were baptized by him, in Jordan, confessing their sins. The act of baptism was the great confessing act. So our Lord commanded his disciples to require like evidences of faith of those who came to them for baptism before they admitted them to the rite. See Mat. 28 :

19. Mark 16: 15. Now that the Apostles and first Ministers practiced in conformity to this commandment of the Lord, is clear from Acts 2: 37 to 41; also Acts 8: 37; Acts 18: 8, &c., &c. That baptism is the great confessional act of the christian economy is distinctly stated in 1 Tim. 6: 12. Here it is said of Timothy that he had "professed (confessed) a good profession before many witnesses." The Greek word *omologia*, rendered "professed" here, is rendered confess in the next verse; and so it should have been rendered here. Now that this good confession before many witnesses was made in his baptism, I suppose no candid Biblical scholar will deny. See Scott's Com.

We have taught here, that confession went to vindicate the law and government of God, and therefore, that it was an acceptable act of homage and worship; and so our Lord teaches concerning John's baptism. "And all the people that heard him, and the Publicans, justified God; being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and Lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him." Luke 7: 29, 30. Here the acts of confession and baptism are identified with each other, and that by the great Master in Israel. I assume, therefore, that I have not only proved confession to be a rudimental principle in the divine government, and a prime doctrine of the christian economy, but that baptism has been appointed and ordained by our Lord to be the act by which a convert to Christ shall make acceptable confession to God, before men.

And now, my dear reader, if I have, by scripture proof, established these hypotheses, may I respectfully and affectionately enquire whether you have done your duty in these regards? Have you honored the law of God by an ingenuous and prayerful confession of your sins to him who only can forgive? If you have done so, and have experienced the love of Christ in the par-

pon of your sins, have you since "justified God" in the plan or salvation, by publicly confessing him in baptism, as he has instructed you to do? If not, how can you meet him in the eternal world? What excuse can you make for wilfully disobeying his positive command? You may have persuaded yourself, as others may have persuaded you, that something else will do as well. But remember, God admits no creature to legislate for him. He has instituted all the laws of his kingdom, and to them he holds all men amenable. To him alone you must account, and not to men. I therefore beseech you to submit to his authority, and accept the grace proposed.

Impenitent sinner, you have not, and perhaps will not confess to Christ before you die. But O, you will be compelled to confess to him sooner or later; for it is written, "As I live saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God."—Again it is written, "That at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, of things in heaven and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

O, sinner! you must either confess to Christ now, while he is dispensing pardons to the guilty, or you must confess to him as he sits on the great white throne to judge the world. From that throne no mercy issues; no pardons are dispensed. O, then, be entreated to humble yourself under his mighty hand now, while the sceptre of mercy is extended to you. Confess to him now, and seek his mercy before it is too late, forever too late.

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